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PLEASE PASS TO PEACE CORPS

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SUBJECT: FORMER PRESIDENT CARTER VISITS BOLIVIA

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Kris Urs for reasons 1.4 (b,d.)

11. (U) SUMMARY. Former President Jimmy Carter, his wife, and members of the Carter Center in Atlanta visited Bolivia April 30-May 3. The former President met (in chronological order) with the Embassy Country Team, Foreign Minister Choquehuanca, presidential candidate Victor Hugo Cardenas, President Morales and opposition governors. Press covered the visit extensively and overall put a positive spin on the trip. President Carter and Morales have a close relationship, with Morales previously visiting the Carters' property in Plains, Georgia and President Carter promising to visit coca fields with Morales. Carter's main goals were to seek improvement of bilateral relations, discuss the upcoming December presidential elections, and hear concerns by opposition groups. After the meetings, the Morales administration continued to criticize the United States for "events of the past," but stated its willingness to improve bilateral relations "under the condition of mutual respect." END SUMMARY.

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THE PEANUT FARMER & THE COCA GROWER
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12. (C) Former President and Mrs. Carter met with President Morales at 7:00 AM May 2 at the Presidential Palace. Minister Quintana and Minister Rada were also present. The meeting "went well" according to President Carter's political advisor on Latin America, Jennifer McCoy. McCoy told the Charge that President Carter steered clear of several sensitive topics, including counter-narcotics issues. President Carter pushed hard for an improved bilateral relationship, urging President Morales to issue a public statement inviting the Peace Corps to return to Bolivia. When President Carter asked Morales for his views on a new exchange of Ambassadors between the U.S. and Bolivia, Morales said that the GOB wanted very much to see a return of Andean Trade Preferences and Drug Eradication Act (ATPDEA) benefits and Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) eligibility. Morales said that President Bush had suspended both programs against the wishes of the U.S. Congress. President Carter responded that President Morales' support in the U.S. Congress was no longer as strong as it had been and suggested a third track people-to-people dialogue between the

U.S. and Bolivia to increase understanding. Morales was enthusiastic about the concept, which would also include Congressional staffers. Morales expressed hope that the upcoming U.S.-Bolivia talks would help resolve issues in the bilateral relationship, insisting that relations had to be based on a mutual respect.

13. (U) Following the meeting, President Carter and Morales gave a joint press conference. President Carter denounced those who were seeking to "separate Bolivia" and said he would return to Bolivia for the December elections, saying that he was "sure that they would be the clear expression of the (Bolivian) people's will." He said President Obama is a "new hero" to lead the bilateral relations, and he hoped for a bettering of the situation, to include an exchange of Ambassadors and the return of the Peace Corps to Bolivia. President Carter explained that he had "assured" Morales that Peace Corps members are "young idealists" that would only be in Bolivia to "help in the fight against poverty." President Carter said that he had been invited to the Chapare to harvest coca with President Morales on his next trip to Bolivia.

14. (U) Morales again praised President Obama's attitude at the Summit of Americas, but also accused Ambassador Goldberg and the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) of conspiring with the opposition looking to divide the country. In relation to the Peace Corps, Morales insisted that he never expelled the organization, but said that Ambassador Goldberg and the Embassy had "pressured" volunteers to spy on Cuban and Venezuelan personnel working in Bolivia. Under the conditions explained by President Carter, Morales said the Peace Corps would be welcome in Bolivia.

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PREFECTURAL PRIORITIES
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15. (C) President Carter and his team flew to Santa Cruz on May 2 to meet with opposition governors from Santa Cruz, Beni, Tarija and Chuquisaca. In a press conference after the meeting, President Carter said he hoped the sides could work together. Privately, however, President Carter and McCoy told emboff that the prefects had basically "complained the whole time." McCoy acknowledged, however, that the prefects did have some justifiable concerns, including several law suits against them and the lack of a constitutional court. McCoy feels that even an opposition victory in December "won't help them, because Bolivia lacks several key democratic infrastructures." In her opinion, Bolivia was in a "major transition period" and things would improve with the implementation of the new constitution (passed January 25). (NOTE: After the prefect meeting, President Carter made a few statements to the press, one which was published the next day as "President Carter says new ambassadors will be appointed in June," which got picked up by the Associated Press. McCoy contacted the Embassy to assure us that President Carter was "misquoted" but several papers ran the story regardless. END NOTE.)

16. (C) Opposition members that attended the President Carter meeting appreciated being heard, but said they knew that President Carter had already met with Morales that morning and their concerns were clearly not going to be raised with him. Congressman Arturo Murillo of the National Unity Party lamented that President Carter's promise to visit the Chapare was a "political show looking forward to the presidential elections in December." The President of the Bolivian Senate, Oscar Ortiz accused President Carter of "traveling around the world trying to stay friendly with everyone" and said that President Carter's future visit to the Chapare "could be used by the government to deny that any excess coca ends up in narcotrafficking."

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MORE MEETINGS
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¶7. (C) President Carter met Foreign Minister David Choquehuanca May 1. President Carter relayed to emboff that Choquehuanca "had a great respect" for Secretary Clinton and that the Bolivians are "serious" about improving the bilateral relationship. Choquehuanca told President Carter that the United States would need to "prove its respect" of Bolivia but did not offer any specific examples on how to do so. According to President Carter, Choquehuanca was "extremely hopeful" about the high level meetings agreed to at the Summit of the Americas.

¶8. (C) President Carter and his team also met with Victor Hugo Cardenas, former Vice-President and an announced candidate to run against Morales in December. Cardenas, who is also indigenous, recounted recent events, including an attack on his home by Morales supporters. According to opposition strategist Javier Flores (PLEASE PROTECT), President Carter seemed "well-informed" about Cardenas' case and said it was a "pity" that rights to dissent were not being respected. Cardenas joked that he could win with "President Carter's support," but President Carter just laughed and said he would remain "neutral."

¶9. (C) President Carter was to meet with the National Electoral Court (CNE) on the afternoon of May 1, but when word was received that the Court President Jose Luis Exeni had resigned, President Carter decided it "wouldn't be appropriate to meet." President Carter's team told emboff they thought Exeni had done "a pretty good job" but acknowledged that the opposition had wanted him gone. According to Flores, just that morning, Victor Hugo Cardenas told the former President that he "didn't trust" Exeni and predicted that he would step down due to "political pressure and a seemingly impossible biometrics deadline." Cardenas remained skeptical that a Morales-appointed replacement would fare any better.

¶10. (C) President Carter also met with the Bolivian Press Association to raise concerns over freedoms and abuses in Bolivia toward the media. One participant explained to emboff that while the meeting started well, by the end, President Carter was openly defending Morales, and pleading with the press members to "not be so hard on his friend Evo." He further asked the press "how many of them identified with the opposition," and said he could "not tell his friend (Evo) that he was abusing the press" as he "couldn't imagine how (Morales) would react." The press was left with a final disheartening statement from President Carter: "at any rate, in Ecuador things are worse than here."

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COUNTRY TEAM DINNER
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¶11. (C) In a briefing with the Embassy Country Team, President Carter was concerned about the bilateral relationship and said he was pleased to hear of the positive meetings between Foreign Minister Choquehuanca and Secretary Clinton at the Summit of the Americas. He said that most leaders that reach out to the Carter Center do so because "diplomatic channels aren't working." President Carter remained skeptical of Embassy meetings with opposition members and asked the Charge if the Embassy had "lowered its profile" out of respect for the Morales administration. The Charge said the Embassy had kept a lower profile, due to the situation and the absence of an ambassador. The Charge also said that Embassy programs work in all areas of Bolivia and that maintaining relationships with elected officials - opposition or otherwise - was crucial to their success.

¶12. (C) The former President was disappointed to hear of the removal of the Peace Corps program from Bolivia. (NOTE: The Peace Corps suspended programming in Bolivia in 2008 after the Morales administration accused the organization of being an intelligence agency. Volunteers were removed from the country for their safety. END NOTE.) The Charge explained the circumstances of the Peace Corps' departure and that a guarantee from Morales on volunteers' safety would be needed

for a return of the program. President Carter said the Peace Corps "had a special place in his heart" and agreed to discuss the role of the Peace Corps to President Morales in his meeting.

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COMMENT
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¶13. (C) Publicly, Former President Carter's visit was generally viewed positively by both the Morales administration and the Bolivian public. More privately, opposition members and press were disappointed by his support of Morales. President Carter's relationship with Morales allows him to talk to Morales without answering the usual accusations of the Morales government. He did not, however, use his relationship with Morales to raise issues of serious concern to the USG, such as the increased levels of coca cultivation and consequent cocaine production. Country team brought up issues of democratic exclusion, legally dubious arrests and concerns about electoral transparency, among others, which President Carter did not comment on directly. Despite his friendship with President Carter and admiration of President Obama, Morales remains defiant in his language towards the U.S., leading yet another public reprisal of "death to the yankees" only one day after President Carter departed Bolivia. END COMMENT.
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